

Original Study

## Palliative Care

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### Definitions

Palliative care is a specialized medical approach focused on providing relief and support to individuals who are facing serious illnesses, often those with life-threatening conditions. The primary goal of palliative care is to improve the quality of life for both patients and their families by addressing the physical, emotional, psychosocial, and spiritual aspects of care. Is divided into general and specialized palliative care.

«General palliative care» means palliative care provided by health professionals, who undertake the treatment and care of patients with life-threatening illnesses. General palliative care includes assessment and management of symptoms, communication with the patient about diagnosis and prognosis, collaboration or referral to specialist palliative care services.

«Specialist palliative care» is defined as palliative care provided by a multidisciplinary team, which consists of a doctor, nurse, social worker, psychologist, occupational therapist, physiotherapist, dietician, speech therapist, pharmacist and other therapists who have certified knowledge in palliative care. The minimum composition of the interdisciplinary team is a doctor, a nurse, a social worker, a psychologist. The work of the interdisciplinary team can be supported by specially trained volunteers.

«Pediatric palliative care» is defined as the provision of health services for the treatment and care of the, the infants, the children and the adolescents with problems related to life-threatening or chronic progressive diseases.

**The basic principles** governing palliative care are the following:

- a) the formation of an integrated and scientifically documented methodology, including through the preparation of a National Action Plan for the Development of Palliative Care with the ultimate goal of ensuring the quality of patients life and respecting their dignity.
- b) the adoption of a patient-centered approach during the provision of palliative care services, by a multidisciplinary team of health professionals.
- c) the improvement of the conditions of access to treatment and hospitalization of patients who need palliative care, so as to ensure the possibility of providing health care at their residence or in structures suitable for them.

**Key features of palliative care include:**

**Symptom Management:** Palliative care aims to alleviate the physical symptoms associated with serious illnesses, such as pain, nausea, shortness of breath, and fatigue. Controlling these symptoms can greatly enhance a patient's comfort and overall well-being.

**Holistic Approach:** Palliative care takes a holistic approach, considering the patient's entire well-being rather than just focusing on the disease itself. This involves addressing psychological, social, and spiritual needs in addition to physical symptoms.

**Communication and Decision-Making:** Palliative care encourages open and honest communication between patients, families, and healthcare providers. It helps patients and their families make informed decisions about their care, including treatment options, goals, and end-of-life preferences.

**Support for Families:** Palliative care recognizes that a serious illness affects not only the patient but also their loved ones. It offers support and guidance to family members, helping them navigate the challenges of caregiving and providing emotional assistance during a difficult time.

**Providing Comfort:** Palliative care often takes place in various settings, including hospitals, hospices, and even at home. The focus is on providing a comfortable and supportive environment that aligns with the patient's wishes and preferences.

**Collaborative Approach:** Palliative care involves a multidisciplinary team of healthcare professionals, which may include doctors, nurses, social workers, chaplains, psychologists, and others. This team works together to address various aspects of the patient's care.

## **Goals of Palliative Care:**

- **Relief of Pain and Symptoms:** Palliative care focuses on managing pain and other distressing symptoms that may result from a serious illness or its treatments. The goal is to enhance the patient's comfort and overall well-being.
- **Enhancing Quality of Life:** Palliative care aims to improve the patient's quality of life by addressing physical, emotional, and psychological needs. This includes helping patients maintain their independence and engage in activities that bring them joy.
- **Emotional and Psychosocial Support:** Dealing with a serious illness can lead to emotional and psychological challenges for both patients and their families. Palliative care offers counseling, therapy, and emotional support to help individuals cope with anxiety, depression, and other emotional difficulties. The exploitation of use the modern electronic telemedicine methods, for the counseling support of patients and their families.
- **Facilitating Communication:** Palliative care professionals help facilitate honest and open communication among patients, their families, and healthcare providers. These discussions may involve treatment options, advanced care planning, and end-of-life wishes.
- **Supporting Decision-Making:** As patients face complex medical decisions, palliative care teams provide information and guidance to help patients and their families make informed choices that align with their values and goals.
- **Coordination of Care:** Palliative care teams work collaboratively with the patient's primary medical team to ensure a seamless and coordinated approach to care. This helps prevent unnecessary hospitalizations and ensures that all aspects of the patient's well-being are addressed.
- **Improvement of human resources:** with appropriate education and training in the needs of palliative care

## **Palliative Care vs. Hospice Care:**

The history of modern palliative care is short and many of those who formed it are still alive. The global Social movement is due to the vision, commitment and courage of some famous but also many anonymous health scientists to change the care of what they were initially called «end-stage patients». The latest thirty years of terminal care Is developing as a separate special area of study and research. In Great Britain, the US and Canada are often used interchangeably with the terms either hospice care or palliative care. It's important to

note that palliative care is not synonymous with end-of-life care or hospice care, although there is some overlap.

Palliative care can begin at any stage of a serious illness, not just when someone is approaching the end of life.

Hospice care, on the other hand, is a form of palliative care that specifically focuses on individuals with a prognosis of six months or less to live.

Palliative care aims to enhance the quality of life, promote dignity, and provide support to both patients and their families during a challenging time. It can be an integral part of a patient's overall medical treatment plan, helping them live as comfortably and fully as possible.

While both palliative care and hospice care focus on providing comfort and support, there are some key differences:

**Timing:** Palliative care can begin at any stage of a serious illness, regardless of whether a patient is receiving curative treatment.

Hospice care is typically provided when a patient has a prognosis of six months or less to live and is no longer pursuing curative treatment.

**Treatment Goals:** Palliative care may be provided alongside curative treatments and aims to improve the patient's quality of life while managing symptoms.

Hospice care is focused on providing comfort and support at the end of life, with the goal of enhancing the patient's quality of life during their final months.

**Location:** Palliative care can be provided in various settings, including hospitals, clinics, and the patient's own home. Hospice care is often provided in the patient's home or in a hospice facility.

**Scope of Services:** Palliative care addresses a wider range of needs, including symptom management, emotional support, and assistance with decision-making. Hospice care primarily focuses on pain and symptom management, emotional support, and ensuring a peaceful and dignified end-of-life experience.

### **Palliative Care as Part of Comprehensive Care:**

Palliative care is increasingly recognized as an essential component of comprehensive healthcare. It complements disease-focused treatments by providing a holistic approach that addresses the person as a whole, considering their physical, emotional, social, and spiritual needs. By incorporating palliative care principles into medical care, patients can experience improved well-being, enhanced communication, and better symptom management throughout the course of their illness.

### **Advanced Care Planning:**

Palliative care encourages conversations about advance care planning, which involves discussing and documenting a patient's preferences for medical treatment and end-of-life care. This includes decisions about resuscitation, life-sustaining treatments, and the use of medical interventions. Advanced care planning ensures that the patient's wishes are respected and followed, even if they're unable to communicate their preferences later on.

### **Cultural and Personalized Care:**

Palliative care acknowledges the importance of cultural, religious, and personal beliefs. It respects and integrates these factors into the care plan to provide culturally sensitive and patient-centered support. Recognizing and addressing cultural and spiritual values helps patients and families find comfort and meaning during challenging times.

## **ROLE OF PALLIATIVE CARE IN ONCOLOGIC PATIENTS**

Supportive and palliative care play critical roles in oncology by addressing the physical, emotional, and psychosocial needs of individuals with cancer and their families. These aspects greatly impact the patient's overall quality of life during and after cancer treatment. Here's how supportive and palliative care contribute to improving quality of life in oncology:

1. **Symptom Management:** Cancer and its treatments such as chemotherapy, radiation therapy, and surgery can lead to significant side effects like pain, fatigue, nausea, and shortness of breath. Supportive and palliative care teams work to manage these symptoms in advanced or terminal stages of cancer effectively, helping patients experience greater comfort and well-being, allowing them to spend their remaining time in as much dignity as possible. By minimizing treatment-related discomfort, patients can continue their treatments with a better quality of life.
2. **Emotional and Psychological Support:** A cancer diagnosis often brings emotional challenges such as anxiety, depression, fear, and uncertainty. Supportive care professionals, including psychologists and counselors, provide emotional support

and coping strategies to help patients and their families navigate these difficult emotions.

3. **Communication and Decision-Making improvement** : Supportive care teams facilitate open and honest communication among patients, families, and medical providers. They help patients understand their diagnosis, treatment options, and potential outcomes, enabling informed decision-making that aligns with the patient's values and goals.
4. **Advance Care Planning**: Supportive and palliative care teams engage in advance care planning discussions, ensuring that patients' wishes regarding medical treatments, resuscitation, and end-of-life care are documented and respected.
5. **Enhancing Quality of Life**: Supportive care focuses on improving the patient's overall quality of life. This involves addressing physical symptoms, managing side effects of treatments, and providing psychosocial support to enable patients to engage in activities that bring them joy and fulfillment.
6. **Family Support**: Cancer affects not only patients but also their families. Supportive care offers guidance, counseling, and resources to help families cope with the challenges of caregiving, emotional strain, and adjustments to the new dynamics brought about by the illness.
7. **Grief and Bereavement Support**: When cancer outcomes are not favorable, supportive and palliative care teams offer bereavement support to families after the loss of a loved one. This helps them navigate the grieving process and cope with their loss.
8. **Nutritional Support**: Cancer and its treatments can affect a patient's ability to eat and maintain proper nutrition. Supportive care teams include dietitians who provide guidance on maintaining a healthy diet, managing weight changes, and addressing nutritional deficiencies.
9. **Transition to End-of-Life Care**: In cases where cancer progresses to an advanced or terminal stage, palliative care becomes an integral part of ensuring the patient's comfort and dignity. Palliative care teams provide end-of-life support, pain management, and emotional care to patients and their families during this challenging time.
10. **Spiritual and Existential Support**: Cancer often prompts individuals to reflect on deeper aspects of life and purpose. Supportive care professionals, including chaplains and spiritual counselors, provide guidance and support in exploring spiritual and existential questions. Supportive care professionals help patients find hope and meaning in their journey, even when facing difficult circumstances. They assist in

setting realistic goals and finding sources of inspiration.

11. **Reducing Healthcare Costs:** By effectively managing symptoms, side effects, and treatment-related complications, supportive and palliative care can help reduce hospital readmissions and emergency room visits. This not only improves the patient's quality of life but also reduces healthcare costs.
12. **Caregiver Support:** Supportive and palliative care also extend their support to caregivers who play a crucial role in a patient's cancer journey. They offer education, respite care, and emotional support to caregivers, recognizing the challenges they face.
13. **Individualized Care Plans:** Both supportive and palliative care plans are tailored to each patient's unique needs and preferences. These plans take into account factors such as age, medical history, cultural background, and personal values to ensure a personalized and patient-centered approach.
14. **Integrating Complementary Therapies:** Complementary therapies like acupuncture, yoga, music therapy, and art therapy are often integrated into supportive and palliative care plans. These therapies can help reduce pain, anxiety, and improve overall well-being.
15. **Enhancing Caregiver Knowledge:** Supportive and palliative care teams provide education and training to caregivers on how to manage symptoms, administer medications, and provide emotional support. This empowers caregivers to confidently care for their loved ones.
16. **Psychosocial Interventions:** Psychosocial interventions in supportive care involve individual counseling, support groups, and therapeutic interventions to help patients and their families cope with emotional distress, improve communication, and enhance emotional well-being.
17. **Addressing Financial and Practical Concerns:** Cancer treatment can bring financial burdens and practical challenges. Supportive care teams assist patients and families in navigating insurance, accessing financial resources, and managing logistical aspects of care.
18. **Monitoring Treatment Response:** Supportive care teams closely monitor patients' responses to treatments, making adjustments as needed to ensure optimal symptom management and overall well-being.
19. **Easing Transitions between Settings:** Palliative care teams assist with transitions between different care settings, such as hospitals, hospices, and home care. This helps patients receive consistent care regardless of where they are in their cancer journey.

In summary, supportive and palliative care in oncology encompass a wide range of interventions and approaches that collectively improve the well-being of cancer patients and their families. By addressing physical, emotional, psychosocial, and practical needs, these approaches contribute to enhancing the overall quality of life throughout the cancer journey, from diagnosis to survivorship or end-of-life care, allowing patients to maintain their dignity, have better control over their care, and experience a more compassionate and comprehensive healthcare experience.

By focusing on these multidimensional aspects, these approaches significantly enhance the patient's quality of life, empower them to make informed decisions, and ensure that their well-being is a central consideration throughout their cancer journey.

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